

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03751 021401Z
ACTION NEA-10

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 4765
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT SY
SUBJECT: LE REVEIL ARTICLE ON SYRIAN JEWISH BRIDES

REF: (A) DAMASCUS 4710, (B) STATE 180031

1. FOLLOWING IS INFORMAL TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH OF REF ARTICLE IN JULY 25 LE REVEIL.
2. "FOURTEEN MARRIAGES CELEBRATED AT THE SAME TIME... AND BY PROXY IN ONE OF THE 36 SYNAGOGUES OF DAMASCUS... A RECORD NEVER BEFORE ATTAINED. IN RATHER PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES, SINCE THESE MARRIAGES WERE 'NEGOTIATED' BY RABBI STEVEN SHLOMO, A VERY RICH AMERICAN, WITH THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES.
3. "TUESDAY, MARCH 19, IS THE DAY WHEN THESE 14 MARRIAGES WERE PERFORMED, IN THE PRESENCE OF NUMEROUS MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF DAMASCUS, HEADED BY THE COMMUNITY'S DOYEN, 93 YEAR-OLD SELIM TOTAH.
4. "EVERYTHING WAS FORESEEN AND PREPARED, THE BOUQUETS OF FLOWERS, THE SWEETS WITH SUGAR-COATED ALMONDS.

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5. "THE YOUNG BRIDES WERE THERE TOUCHED WITH EMOTION, ALIGNED IN TWO ROWS, EACH ONE HAVING A PROXY AGENT AT HER SIDE WHO TOOK THE TRADITIONAL VOWS BEFORE THE OFFICIATING RABBI.
6. "RABBI STEVEN SHLOMO, WHO IS MAKING A TOUR OF MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES, CAME TO DAMASCUS TO DISCUSS WITH SYRIAN AUTHORITIES THE SITUATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN DAMASCUS.

AS A CONSEQUENCE, HE ASKED THE SYRIAN PRESIDENT TO AUTHORIZE THE 14 YOUNG JEWISH GIRLS TO LEAVE SYRIA TO GO TO THE UNITED STATES TO JOIN THEIR HUSBANDS. PRESIDENT ASSAD POSED NO OBJECTION AND ADDED: 'THIS IS A PRESENT WHICH I AM MAKING TO PRESIDENT CARTER.'

7. "AFTER HAVING OBTAINED PERMISSION, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY BUSIED ITSELF WITH THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE 14 MARRIAGES. ONE OF THE 36 SYNAGOGUES EXISTING IN DAMASCUS WAS CHOSEN FOR THE CEREMONY, WHICH TOOK PLACE ON JULY 19 AMID MUCH GAIETY. AND THE 14 NEWLYWEDS ARE NOW WAITING FOR THEIR DEPARTURE FOR THE USA WHICH WILL NOT BE LONG.

8. "ONCE ARRIVED, THEY WILL GET TO KNOW THEIR HUSBANDS; IF THE MARRIED COUPLE AGREE, THE MARRIAGE WILL BE CONSUMMATED AND CONFIRMED; IF THE CONTRARY IS THE CASE, AND IF THE 'MARRIED COUPLE' DO NOT SUIT EACH OTHER, THEY CAN OBTAIN A DIVORCE ACCORDING TO JEWISH LAW.

9. "CONTRARY TO THE CLAIMS OF ISRAELI PROPAGANDA, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF SYRIA, WHICH NUMBERS 3500 SOULS, DOES NOT SUFFER ANY HARASSMENT OR OPPRESSION. IT LIVES IN COMPLETE FREEDOM. BETTER YET, IT RECEIVES SPECIAL CARE FROM THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES; A SPECIAL DEPARTMENT LOOKS AFTER THE COMMUNITY AND ASSURES THAT ITS MEMBERS RECEIVE ALL NECESSARY PROTECTION AGAINST ANY HARASSMENT. THIS HAS BEEN CONFIDED TO US BY A RELIABLE SOURCE.
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10. "THIS IS A REJOINDER TO THE CLAIMS OF ISRAELI PROPAGANDA WHICH DECLARES THAT THE 'JEWS OF SYRIA ARE THE OBJECT OF HARASSMENT AND CANNOT FREELY LEAVE SYRIA.'
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